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Christianity and Civil Government.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED ON

SABBATH EVENING, NOVEMBER 10, 1850.

BY

REV. WILLIAM ADAMS, D.D.,
PASTOR OF THE CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

NEW YORK:
CHARLES SCRIBNER,
(LATE BAKER & SCRIBNER.)
145 NASSAU STREET AND 36 PARK ROW.
1851.

Submittamus nos tum Deo, tum aliis, tum iis
qui imperium in terra gerunt: Deo quidem omni-
bus de causis; alii autem aliis propter caritatis
fædus; principibus denique propter ordinem, publi-
cæque disciplinæ rationem.

Gregory Nazianzen:

ORAT. 17.

TO
THE PEOPLE OF HIS PASTORAL CARE,
AND TO ALL READERS
WHO AIM TO REGULATE THEIR LIVES BY RELIGIOUS RULES
~~THIS ATTEMPT~~.
TO EXPLAIN THE DUTIES OF CITIZENS ACCORDING
TO CHRISTIAN ETHICS, IS AFFECTIONATELY
AND RESPECTFULLY
INSCRIBED BY
THE AUTHOR.

REV. WILLIAM ADAMS, D.D.

DEAR SIR :—Having listened with high gratification, to your excellent discourse on the application of Christianity to Civil Government, and feeling assured that an extensive distribution of it would be eminently useful, we take leave to request a copy of it for publication.

Very respectfully and truly,

Your Friends and obdt. Servts,

HIRAM KETCHUM.

JAMES BOORMAN.

BENJ. L. SWAN.

S. S. HOWLAND.

W. R. CROSBY.

AMORY GAMAGE.

SAM. M. BLATCHFORD.

JOHN TENBROOK.

CHARLES A. BULKLEY.

GEORGE BACON.

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F. F. MARBURY.

JOHN C. BALDWIN.

STEPHEN M. CHESTER.

JAMES B. THOMPSON.

J. M. HALSTED.

FREDERIC BULL.

JOSEPH HYDE.

GENTLEMEN :—I defer to your judgment in transmitting, for your disposal, the discourse which, in terms so kind, you have requested for publication. The substance of it, as some of you

may remember, was preached in June, 1848; long before any discussion had arisen in this country relative to the Fugitive Slave Law. The circumstances which gave rise to it were the remarkable revolutions then in progress in Europe. It seemed to me that Christianity could not look with indifference on those uprisings of patriotism and freedom; while her restraining power was greatly needed to prevent freedom from degenerating into anarchy.

It is well known to you that when the last Revolution in France was in progress, a host of theorists made their appearance, who proposed to take advantage of that event, for re-organising society on new and peculiar principles. Of the eleven men who were hastily called to the provincial government of that country, four were the prominent leaders of a party or sect, which, with several minor distinctions, passed under the general name of Communists. The smooth roots of speculation, all of a sudden, brought forth the stinging nettles of political peril and trouble. Interested as is my profession in every event relating to the happiness of man, I was at some pains to procure the principal French writers whose opinions had been most active in the new order of things, and acquaint myself with the Philosophy of those movements which contemplated great changes as to Social Inequalities, Labor, Tenure of Property, Law and Government. During the last year I prepared and delivered a series of Discourses on the application of Christianity to these social questions; under the sober conviction that the religion of the New Testament has promise of the "life that now is as well as of that which is to come;" that it is something more than a bridge to help us across the river of Death, even a light by which to journey, a hope by which to toil, a motive by which to live day by day; and that its oil is not merely for the extreme unction of the dying, but for rendering the limbs of the athlete supple and strong in the arena of present duty. When in this series of related topics the time arrived for introducing the subject of Civil Government, events had occurred in our own country which gave an unexpected interest to the subject, and a new application to the argument. So that while a part of the discourse was actually written with special reference to the changes going on in the Old World, a part was prepared with par-

ticular reference to events then transpiring under our own government.

I have no apology to make for introducing this topic into the sacred desk. "Preaching politics," as that expression is generally understood, is a habit to which neither judgment nor taste incline me; but the explication of a doctrine set forth distinctly and frequently in the very words of Inspiration, might be admitted to be within the proper province of the Christian ministry, even if we did not see its immediate bearing on the supremacy of religion and the substantial happiness of man.

At the time this discourse was first delivered (10 Nov.,) the pulpit, so far as my information extends, had made no expression of the views here exhibited. I could not then, as I might now, avail myself in the construction of my argument, of the better reasonings and reflections of many in my profession. As I would not presume to dictate to others so I have not borrowed my sentiments from others. That these should meet with universal approbation is more than I anticipate. I assume no infallibility and no authority; but shall be sufficiently gratified if it should be thought that, in the expression of my deliberate and independent sentiments, I have not violated the law of Christian meekness and modesty. I will not conceal that it has been a source of pleasure to me to be informed by some of our most intelligent fellow-citizens, who have listened to this discourse, that it has contributed its share for the relief of their minds on certain points where many are perplexed with the fear of going wrong. Should the same result be accomplished in other cases, it will be to me an occasion of devout joy.

I am, gentlemen, with very true regard,

Your friend and obedient servant,

W. ADAMS.

DISCOURSE.

LET every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

—ROMANS xiii. 1—7.

THE subject suggested by this passage of inspired Scripture involves matters vital to human happiness. For long ages mankind have been theorizing and experimenting, toiling and suffering in their vain attempts to reach the truth pertaining to civil government. Extreme doctrines have been set forth on either side; inculcating abject submission and lawless freedom. Curious theories have been elaborated as to the origin and authority of government; the right and the wrong of undertaking any modifications of the ruling power; and it would seem that upon this subject the world had

“ever been learning and never been able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” At this present hour, the whole surface of civilized society is rolling and heaving, like the bosom of the sea, because of the internal forces which are at work pertaining to the uses and abuses of political power. Nor is this to be wondered at when we consider the immediate connection which subsists between the administration of the state, and the dearest rights, and highest interests of mankind.

We believe that the world never will arrive at a state of repose and satisfaction on this subject till the great principles relative to civil government contained in the Word of God are made the basis of human sentiment and practice. There must be an ethical osteology in the body politic. There must be a religious basis beneath the pillars of the state ; nor will we ever believe that a subject so intimately related to the well-being of man is forever to be secularized away from Christian rule ; and that because it would be indecorous for the teachers of religion to mingle in the petty affairs of party politics, therefore, they have no duty to perform, and no lessons to impart relative to the claims of government as derived from the Gospel of the Son of God.

Most of the theories which have been promulgated as to the origin and province of government, have been elicited by special and local questions ; and accordingly they have, in most instances, been too partisan in their character and too meagre in their induction. A change in the government of

Berne led Louis Van Haller to conceive his remarkable theory concerning civil government. This may be the process by which truth is smelted out at last. A practical case arises in the administration of the state which elicits differences of opinion. Those opinions may be extreme and extravagant on either side ; but they excite thought ; they lead to comparisons and judgments ; and the effervescence of contrary qualities results in a third quantity, which is nearer the truth than either of the elements which entered into its composition.

It is impossible to deny that circumstances have arisen in our own country which lend to this subject an unusual interest and importance. Sentiments have been broached as to the proper province and prerogatives of government, as to obedience to government and resistance to government, as to the conflicting claims of private conscience and of public duty, which have agitated the country, and by which the minds of many well-meaning men have been sadly confused and perplexed. They are told on the one hand that it is a religious duty to obey governments, and they believe it : they hear much, on the other hand, of the worth and glory of a good conscience, the memory of Christian and patriotic martyrs, and they are convinced that somewhere there is a place and a right of resistance to political power, though they are sorely perplexed to discover and define it : and just in this unhappy, undecided, double-minded condition, multitudes of our own citizens are thrown at this very instant ; so that

our topic is one not of abstraction but practical and pressing importance.

Let me premise that my object is not to advocate or discuss any particular law ; much less to promote any political measure. The ministry of religion knows "no man after the flesh." I do not propose to settle every point of casuistry ; but, if possible, would state the broad principles of Revelation pertaining to the civil power ; principles which may reconcile apparently incongruous sentiments, remove impending obscurities, and establish the identity between good citizenship and practical Christianity.

I begin with stating a few of the more obvious doctrines of the New Testament concerning civil government.

1. *Government—civil government is an ordinance of God, and as such is to be respected and obeyed.* The language of Scripture is very explicit. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God—and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." The bare mention of a passage like this plunges us, at once, into the midst of those great questions which have exhausted the wisdom of the prudent, and convulsed the world with changes. "In what sense is government ordained of God ?" "Is the duty here enjoined a passive obedience to governments of all forms, and in all acts ?" "Are no changes in

civil governments ever countenanced and aided by religion? Is resistance to political power in every case, an act of disloyalty to God? If exceptions are allowed—when, why, and what are they?" Let us not be deterred by the difficulties which environ the subject upon which we are entering; for, with the Word of God, like a lamp, in our hand, we may take our way without fear of losing our path.

I repeat, then, the first and most obvious teaching of the New Testament, on this subject; *Government is ordained of God, for the welfare of his creatures, and as such is to be obeyed.* No mention is here made of the form in which government is to be administered. The expression is generic. "The powers that be," "rulers," "higher powers," are the terms employed, without specifying their names, their office, or the mode of their appointment. Some government is essential to human happiness. Society could not exist without it. There must be restraint, law and order. A ruling power of some sort, under some name, there must be. This necessity exists independent of our choice. It grows out of that constitution of things which God himself has created. The theory of a social compact, as set forth by Rousseau in his famous work—"Sur le Contrat Social," and adopted by other politico-philanthropic writers is alike visionary and atheistic. It is just such a theory as might have been expected from a man so vainly fond of paradox that, when the Academy of Dijon proposed the question, "Whether science and civ-

ilization were serviceable to human happiness," he was forward to espouse the negative side, though against his convictions of truth, because affording him a better opportunity to distinguish himself by startling novelties.

The Being who made us, made the necessity of law and government. Governments never did originate in the mere preference and contract of individuals, who, up to that time were without any government at all. Compacts, constitutions may, indeed, be framed by men, and between men, regulating the *form* in which government shall be administered; but the reality, the necessity of some government depends not at all upon human choice. Talk of a state of nature! When, where was there ever a tribe of uncivilized savages who did not recognize the necessity of some form of law among themselves, rude, barbaric though it was, hereditary or delegated, the will of the oldest, the richest,⁴ or the strongest. The bloodiest pirate-ship that ever prowled on the windward station has its laws. There can be no association of men without them. There is a liberty which is fostered by the gospel, but that liberty is not lawlessness. The most frightful evil which Christianity teaches us to deplore, is anarchy and licentiousness. "Speaking evil of dignities," "despising governments," is an inspired description of the most dangerous of men. Men are not to be left in all things to follow their individual will. Related to others of their species, they are to be restrained by the beneficent power of public

law. The natural liberty of man is, in some respects, diminished by the necessary restraints of society. Human passions are to be confined within certain limits. There may be, there are, degrees of merit in the several forms in which government is administered; but to destroy all government would make Mercy weep and Compassion mourn. Tiberius Cæsar was upon the throne when Jesus Christ paid the tribute which the Roman, in justice, could not claim. Nero was Emperor when Paul wrote to Titus—"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates," and Peter wrote—"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the King as Supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him, for the punishment of evil-doers, as free, and not using your liberty as a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God." It would, as we think, be a forced and artificial interpretation of the clause—*for the Lord's sake*, in this passage, to understand it as requiring obedience only to such enactments as are made from religious principle, with special regard to God's will. Nero was never suspected of enacting or executing any law from such a motive. Its obvious import is, that we should obey government from a principle of obedience to God. Not that Tiberius and Nero were good men; not that a ruler cannot do wrong; not that we are to approve of everything he does or requires; but government, of which even bad men may be the agents—government is

an ordinance of God, and as such is to be honored as a necessary and benignant provision for human happiness. It may be abused ; it may be perverted ; (and of the remedies in such cases I am to speak hereafter), but all government must not and cannot be destroyed. The worst form of tyranny which ever lorded it over injured men, would be paradise in comparison with the entire destruction of all restraining and ruling power. Who, for all the gold that ever was coined, would venture himself and his family in Naples, in Madrid, in Paris, in New York, a single day, in the absence of all law, and government to protect him ? We shudder at the thought of a vast population let loose to follow inclination unchecked and uncontrolled ; their passions clashing in turbulent confusion, and destroying each other by the conflicts of physical force. The ruling power, says the gospel, is God's minister for good. Somewhere, under some name, in some form, there is a power which governs ; yes, which *governs* ; which holds the will of the individual in subjection to public laws. These laws may not be perfect, but the idea that every man is to be a law unto himself is Utopian, and unchristian. We look, with unspeakable interest, on the struggles of men in the Old World who are striving for a more liberal government, for laws more humane and just ; we believe that the Gospel aids and encourages such aspirations and struggles (and it will be for me in the sequel to show how this influence of the Gospel is to be reconciled with the obedient spirit now under consideration) but wherever there are men

who have conceived the idea of demolishing all governments and all laws, lifting aloft the blood-red flag as the sign of universal anarchy—to them we say, the Gospel has no sympathy with licentiousness. The “*jus divinum*” of Kings may have been monstrously abused, but government is no invention of king-craft. Law is not a device of man. It is an ordinance of God. Its necessity is laid in infinite goodness, and never can it be abrogated. The God who made us has ordained that there should be a power—how appointed, how invested, I do not now say; a *power*—that is the word—not mere mawkish sentimentalism, but a power that wields the sword, a sword not of feather, not of lath, but of veritable steel, the symbol of authority which, in God’s name, shall punish the evil-doer, and stand as a barrier against wild and atrocious lawlessness. Brawling, riotous, ferocious resistance to all governments, is a sort of liberty which finds no favor from the spirit of Christianity. We should respect, revere, honor magistracy as the exponent of God’s legislation for human happiness. The more free our institutions, the more established our rights, the more we should honor the ruling power which protects and blesses us. A self-governed people should never fail in the sentiment of loyalty; for in the degree in which they are deficient here they rebuke and condemn themselves.

2. We are now prepared to advance to a second position, which is, that the Word of God, while it enjoins obedience to government, no where pre-

scribes the form in which that government shall exist: but has left this as a thing capable of improvement, to the experience and preference of men themselves, within the limits of certain general principles of equality and equity, liberty and law, which are, to the last degree, reasonable and essential.

This statement, if it can be verified, will dispose at once of a thousand questions, by which the minds of men have been embarrassed, in reference to this subject. For it has been the policy of despotism, in all ages, to make it appear that there is but one form of civil government sanctioned by heaven; that every attempt to change this is to be branded as impiety, and therefore, a revolutionary spirit is to be held, in all cases, as essentially atheistical and wicked. The world is full of books concerning the "*divine right of kings*": and the notion which prevailed for ages was, that God anointed kings as his exclusive agents and vicegerents; and therefore religion required passive obedience to them, however cruel, capricious, and unjust their demands.

We can readily understand how such notions have crept into English theology and English literature. In the reign of Henry VIII., when the king's proclamation had the force of law, Cranmer declared, in emphatic words,—I quote his own language—"that God had immediately committed to Christian princes the whole cure of all their subjects, as well concerning the administration of God's word, for the cure of souls, as concerning

the ministration of things political." In the reign of James I., Sir Robert Filmer, the author of the famous treatise on Patriarchal Government, asserted that the Supreme Being regarded hereditary monarchy, as opposed to any other form of government with exclusive favor, a theory which called forth the immortal treatise of Algernon Sidney, a legacy of wealth to the nations. James himself frequently enraged and alarmed his Parliament by telling them that they had no more business to inquire what he might lawfully do than what the Deity might lawfully do. The philosopher Hobbes, writing during the reign of Charles I., affirms that in a literal, not a metaphorical sense, kings are the representatives of God; lords of our faith and our lives, and authoritative interpreters of Scripture. "*L'etat c'est moi*,"—I am the state—said Louis the Fourteenth as he stalked into the hall of his Parliament, with a riding-whip in his hand. The same doctrine of the exclusive divine right of kings is asserted by Bishop Horsely in his celebrated sermon before the House of Lords in the year 1793; a discourse which awakened the indignant rebuke of Robert Hall in his eloquent "Apology for the Freedom of the Press and for General Liberty;" and I have perused a sermon, by a Protestant clergyman, in our own country, in which the extreme doctrine is, I will not say *argued* but *declared*, that to the duty of submission to an established government there are no limitations and no exceptions; that obedience in the state and obedience in things spiritual, are

parts of the same Christian virtue, and that those revolutions which we are accustomed to favor with our good wishes and aid, are in fact rebellion against that patient obedience to civil authority which is enjoined by God.

The weightiest matters, the most important inferences, therefore, are dependent upon the position we have assumed that the Word of God nowhere prescribes the precise form in which government shall be organized. Government in some form it recognizes as essential and divinely authoritative: but it nowhere instructs us that there is any one form to modify which would be disloyal to God.

“Does not Peter, in his general Epistle, require us to *honor the king*?” Unquestionably. Were we aiming at strict historical exactness, we should say that the Roman Emperors were republican magistrates named by the Senate; but royalty, kingship was the form in which government was embodied, when the Apostle Peter wrote his epistle: and Christianity, in all consistency, required its disciples to obey even a heathen monarch rather than rush into the fearful chaos of no government at all. But what has this fact to do with the question whether a better form of government might not be made in the place of that which then existed? The simple fact that our Lord and his disciples conformed to certain institutions existing in their day, in the absence of all specific directions, no more proves that we are to make those same institutions our model and our law, than that we are

to imitate, in every respect, their dress and domestic customs as Orientals. Paul wrote his epistles to the churches on parchment with a stylus; is this an argument to prove that we should never employ what is better—a printing press? The same Apostle coasted along Asia Minor, and pushed into the Adriatic in a rickety and unseaworthy vessel, without a compass; is this a reason why we should not traverse the same waters in a steam-ship, by the aid of a binnacle? The Apostles practised obedience, on Christian principles, to the only form of civil government which then existed; is that an argument to prove that government is not susceptible of improvement, and that, in the progress of events, we may not frame one which is better?

“Did not God ordain a royal house over his ancient people?” Admit that it was so. Are we anywhere instructed that the same form of government is authoritatively prescribed for all times and all people? Look carefully at all the facts of the history. The form of government prescribed for the Jewish people was that of a republican commonwealth, with such legislation for equality and justice as might provoke the most profound admiration in this self-complacent age. But the people themselves were clamorous for a change. They saw the splendors of royalty in the nations which surrounded them; and longed to be like them. For this they were rebuked; they were forewarned of the consequences of their choice; but their passion being unappeasable, God gave

them a king in his wrath, because of their incorrigible wickedness: and the very words, *God save the King*, which England has adopted as her national anthem, were shouted by the people, when Saul was anointed king, under a solemn protest from the mouth of Samuel, who, in God's name, assured them that the permission allowed them was a rebuke and punishment for their folly in rejecting a government which was incomparably better. The language cannot, therefore, be employed as an inspired demonstration of the exclusive claims of royalty.

Admit that the form in which government is to be administered is prescribed in the Word of God, and that this exclusive form is royalty, and by that admission you make all improvements in government impossible; all revolutions in government acts of impiety; and all Christian patriots who have resisted despotism, rebels against heaven. The doctrine of Scripture is perfectly consistent with itself. Government is essential, and government is to be obeyed. But the form in which government is to be administered, and the spirit of its legislation admit of degrees of improvement. Law is not a stereotype letter which changes not from age to age, but a beneficent agent, which, in the gradual progress of Christian civilization, must conform itself more and more to the genial legislation of the gospel. Government is not a colossal figure, seated upon a throne of everlasting rock, holding the same old sceptre of iron, century after century,

never to be modified in form, dress, or utterance. The alternative of government or *no* government, never has been, and never will be presented to man. But the question whether a bad government may not be exchanged for a good one, and this for a better, is one which Christianity more than tolerates; itself proposes, and resolves. There is a sense in which it is perfectly proper and Christian to speak of "the divine right of kings;" and with equal propriety may we speak of the divine right of presidents and governors; the divine right of mayors and sheriffs; the divine right of constables and policemen; for these are *all* ministers of law; and God is not a God of confusion. but of order. Government is divinely appointed, inasmuch as it is conducive to human happiness. The world at the close of the first demiurgic day was better than chaos and old night. The tyranny of one, be that one Nero or Caligula, is better than the tyranny of ten thousand. A diseased eye is better than total blindness; for the diseased organ is susceptible of remedies. Remedies have been employed, defects have been supplied, evils have been corrected, and under the benignant influences of Christianity, civil government has been constantly improving, and it will improve till its whole form and spirit are accordant with the beneficent ends for which it was ordained of God. Governments are not the property of the officials by whom they are administered. They were ordained for the benefit of all; to use the very language of the New Testament, that we *may lead quiet and peaceable lives;*

and the wisdom of God is greatly to be admired in devolving so much the responsibility of deciding the form in which government shall be administered upon those for whose welfare it was ordained. Do not believe that passive obedience to odious tyranny, when a better administration is perfectly feasible, is the only Christian virtue. The Barons of Runnymede were not sinning against God, in securing chartered rights for their country; for these were better than the imperious will of King John or Henry III. Parliamentary reforms are not necessarily assaults upon Christianity. The old Continental Congress of the United States were not sinning against the Most High God, when they judged that they could erect for themselves a better form of government than any across the seas. George Washington was no rebel against his Maker for espousing the same opinion. When President Langdon, of Harvard University, put himself at the head of Col. Prescott's column on Cambridge Common, on the eve of the 17th of June, 1775, and offered up a devout prayer beneath the stars for the success of the expedition then starting for the neighboring heights of Charlestown, he was no Judas, treacherously leading a band with swords and lanterns against the Christ of God. Christianity is no indifferent spectator of the patriotic struggles and revolutions which aim at the reform of abuses. Her own spirit is in the wheels. And when Christianity holds up before the world this compendious doctrine: *Obey governments and make governments better*, she has pro-

mulgated a law, which, for its sublime simplicity and consistency challenges the homage and admiration of the world.

Most of the errors which prevail in our times, as to the organizations of society, are the offspring of a Pantheistic philosophy, which overlooks and neglects our *individuality*. Now the gospel of Christ reverses this order entirely. It commences its great reforms with the heart of the individual man. It begins not with the remote circumference—the nation, to work inward ; but at the heart of each individual and works outward to society.

You have observed, perhaps, with surprise, that the New Testament contains so few directions for rulers and Governments in their distinctive capacity. The reason is, that the directions which Heaven has enacted for the individual man, are capable of an extension and application to any number of men ; that is to society, to nations, and the world. Man is a microcosm ; a little world in himself. One man is the likeness and representative of every other. And the Supreme Being who has revealed all the legislation of the universe in ten precepts, and these epitomized in two : who has comprised the expression of all our lawful desires in one brief formula of prayer ; has, with the same sublime comprehension made known his will as to the Government of the world, in those few and simple principles which the gospel plants in the heart of a child. The government of God does not concern itself primarily and immediately with what is public and national. Its proper kingdom is the human soul.

This rectified, ennobled and blessed national prosperity flows from it as a legitimate consequence. God's method of making good governments is to make good men. Do you ask for the process of improvement? Briefly stated, it is as follows. First, the Gospel kindles the spirit of liberty. It supplies the individual with an adequate stimulus and motive power. It bursts like the morning sun on the statue of Memnon, and makes the motionless marble to sing. It puts beneath a dead and unthinking nature the mighty lever of Christian truth, and lifts man up in God's image, to do God's work. Clothed with the authority of the skies it comes to every man and says—"you are God's child, in God's image, whether in ebony or ivory; for you Christ died, for you the costly expenditures of redemption, and the mansions of glory." Taught the worth of his soul, man stands erect. He dilates with a great inspiration. An unknown importance attaches to his every act. New motives has he in the education of his offspring, the acquisition of property, in the maintenance of his rights. Freedom there will be—for such a man must have room in which to live and work. Before this quickening, ennobling power of religion, there must be uprising against wrongs, abuses must be reformed, oppression must be resisted, and he who has learned that he is to sit on a throne in heaven, will have no tyrant's foot upon his neck while he lives on the earth.

The more you rouse the energies of man—the more of impetus you apply—the more needful is the power of control and restraint. Give to man

nothing but stimulated strength and he is a maniac, burning, breaking, tearing, destroying whatever is in his path. Restrained he must be. But how? Christianity puts the power of control in the very heart which it rouses to life. It makes the man the master of himself. Not one whit does it abate from the spirit of liberty and of life. It does not clog him with weights, nor cripple him with blows, nor cage him within prison-bars; but it puts law in the heart and conscience at the helm. By one ray of celestial light, Christianity solves all the problems which for ages perplexed the whole subject of civil government. Addressing its spiritual teachings to the individual, it makes him loyal to God, puts in his heart the love of justice, liberty, and virtue; makes him at once free and obedient; bold, earnest, courageous, yet acquiescent with his whole soul, in the wholesome laws which look at equity, righteousness, order and peace. It is not true, that despotism and lawlessness are the only alternatives presented to man. Christianity, by its intermediate and conservative power, changes the whole aspect of this controversy. It teaches man how to reform without destroying; how to resist wrong without practising wrong; to find liberty and hold himself back from licentiousness; to advance yet always in the right direction; to make progress, yet always steadying himself by stern faith in truth, in duty and in God. When God put the planets in motion, they were not left with the impetus of a single force. The centrifugal and centripetal were so combined as to make them move in regular and harmonious orbits.

Man, started on his career by the conscious spirit of liberty and power, you might think, was like a comet threatening to burn the earth ; but obedient to the same power which projected him into being, he turns at the right point and comes back around his centre in a beautiful circle of light and blessedness. Taught by the religion of Christ, he carries in his own bosom a combination of forces, impelling and restraining, stimulating and controlling, and he stands before you in all the power and beauty of a *self-governed man*. Man must be governed ; by physical force, if not by internal principles. Begin, as God does, with the heart of individual man ; acquaint him with his destiny, and qualify him for it ; and you may leave all other questions to an easy, natural, and inevitable solution. Thus is it that Christianity enlightens, modifies, and improves the governments of the world, as its power increases over the hearts and minds of individuals. It turns blind submission into rational obedience ; tempers the passion for liberty with the love of order, and places mankind in a happy medium between the extremes of anarchy on the one hand, and oppression on the other ; and when this slowly-advancing power of Christianity is universal, there will be order, peace, liberty, and righteousness throughout the world.

These general principles conceded, a practical question is already answered : ‘ May human governments ever be resisted ? ’ Unquestionably. You cannot deny it without condemning all the Christian patriots who have lived and died in a righteous cause. If governments may be modified and im-

proved, of course, there are cases in which they may be resisted, even forcibly, if necessary; a bitter medicine, actual cautery, or amputation being indispensable to save life. Our American Revolution, for example, can be justified on Christian principles. We cannot go so far as Bishop Berkley, that genial and generous man, and acute reasoner, who has undertaken to demonstrate that it is as much our duty to submit to the most ferocious tyrant, as to submit to the supreme benevolence of God; or rather that to obey such a tyrant is to obey Supreme Benevolence.

We exclaim with Pope:

“ Who first taught souls enslav’d, and realms undone,
The enormous faith of many made for one,
That proud exception to all nature’s laws,
To invert the world and counterwork its cause ! ”

The divine right and authority of government resides in its tendency to promote the peace, protection, order, and happiness of society. This is the object of God’s benevolence; and whatever secures this has the sanction of his will. Government possesses this divine right only as tending to public happiness. It is instrumental and not primary, mediate and not ultimate; and when the public happiness, instead of being, on the whole promoted by obedience, would, upon the whole, where every consequence indirect as well as direct is taken into account, be promoted by shaking off that power which is inconsistent with its great object, remonstrance, even rebellion itself, if that name can fitly be given in such cir-

cumstances of dreadful necessity, to the expression of the public will, has more truly its divine rights than established authority, when forgetful of that end and object for which God has sanctioned it at all.

“The speculative line of demarcation where obedience ought to end, and resistance must begin is,” as Mr. Burke truly says, “faint, obscure, and not easily definable. It is not a single act, or a single event which determines it. Governments must be abused and deranged, indeed, before it can be thought of; and the prospect of the future must be as bad as the experience of the past. When things are in that lamentable condition, the nature of the disease is to indicate the remedy, to those whom nature has qualified to administer in extremities, this critical, ambiguous, and bitter potion to a distempered state. Times and occasions and provocations will teach their own lessons. The wise will determine from the gravity of the case; the high-minded from disdain and indignation at abusive power in unworthy hands; the brave and bold from the love of honorable danger in a generous cause; but with or without right, a revolution will be the very last resource of the thinking and the good.”

“The last resource of the thinking and the good!” says this eloquent writer, but still a resource! And when the necessity occurs, in which the Christian patriot, ‘before obedient to the ruling power, feels that he has now another duty to perform, when he sees with sorrow that a cause which is good in itself will demand the use of means,

from which, with any other motive, he would have shrunk with abhorrence; he will lift his voice sadly indeed, but still loudly; he will lift his arm with reluctance, but when it is lifted, he will wield it with all the force which the thought of the happiness of his country and of the world, as, perhaps, dependent upon it will inspire; for Christian benevolence has made a calculation in which his own happiness, and his own life are not to be counted as elements. If he emerges from the struggle successful, like our own Washington, in the serene evening of his days, he may look back with manly and permitted melancholy at the sacrifices and sufferings which the struggle has cost; and upward, too, with Christian gratitude and joy, at the **HIGHER GOOD**, and the **GREATER HAPPINESS**, present and prospective, which the dread necessity of the sword has secured; and thus Christianity vindicates the righteousness of the cause.

Some may be disappointed if we stop at these general principles. They press us with the question, whether there is not a Power and an authority higher than human government; and whether we are not under an obligation to obey the former in all cases, whenever it comes into conflict and collision with the latter. That question, my brethren, has but one side. I speak as an American citizen, and as a Christian minister. Stated in this form, it admits of no discussion. We are a Christian people. We are not a nation of atheists. We cannot deny the existence and supremacy of God. This question of the supre-

macy of the Almighty, in its naked, abstract form, never was presented in any legislation to the American people. If it were, it would be decided with wonderful unanimity. The people of France once presumed to decide the question; and they pronounced the infatuated opinion that there was no God; and the pressure of divine law taken off, volcanic explosions and earthquakes ensued, the rumblings and reverberations of which have not yet ceased. We must not be drawn into a false issue. The minds of many good men have been thrown into a false position. They have really thought that it was a matter of debate whether there was a Power higher than human government. They know, they feel that there is a God, greater, wiser, and better than man. We all believe it. You must not deny it, or doubt it. If you take for your premises a denial of this truth, imbedded in our hearts, your logic and your legislation will surely be refuted. We cannot admit that, at this period of time, this truth is to be debated. We drew it in with our mother's milk. Our bones are full of the strength of it. It has been taught us in our homes, in our schools, in our churches. The supremacy of God is recognized in our courts of justice, in our halls of legislation, in every judicial oath, in all the solemn forms in which government is administered. It rests as the foundation stone of our Republic, and it cannot be dug up or disturbed.

Prove to us a Christian people what God would have us to do, and our duty is plain. Convince us, by infallible evidence, that God demands a speci-

fic act, and we will do it, though it leads us to lion's dens, or furnaces of fire. We will dare to do it in the face of all interdicts, of all opposition, even, as Luther said when on his way to Worms, if there were as many devils in our path, as tiles upon the houses.

But the real question, and the only question which can arise among a religious people is this: what IS the will of God? How shall we arrive at a knowledge of what God requires of us in a particular case? The general direction is given us in the inspired Scriptures by God himself, that we must obey Government: not for wrath, that is, through fear of punishment, but for "*conscience sake*." Before you can bring the sanction of God's name to countenance resistance to human law, it is incumbent on you to show, by substantial and satisfactory proof that the authority of God requires that resistance. Perhaps you are mistaken. It may be that you are misinformed and have misjudged. The question is, whether the will of God requires or does not require you to obey the civil law. It is a "*petitio principii*,"—a begging of the whole question—to justify your resistance to human law, on the ground of obedience to a Divine law; unless you can furnish adequate proof that the divine law compels you to that resistance. That is the question, the only question, and the whole question that can be presented to a patriotic and Christian citizen. Convince us by infallible proof, that God requires of us to oppose, at all lengths, a given law, then we will oppose it manfully and courageously.

But how do you prove this ? By what process do you arrive at such an authoritative and infallible conviction ? This is the whole gist of the subject. When Peter and John, (a case so often cited, and as often perverted,) refused obedience to the Jewish Sanhedrim, who had prohibited their preaching—saying so gallantly and courageously, “ whether it is right in the sight of God, to hearken unto God, or unto men, judge ye ;” they had infallible, they had Supreme authority to justify their resistance. Their Divine Lord, the personification of divine law had commanded them to do that definite and distinctive thing. It was not a matter of doubtful propriety, of uncertain inference with them, what to do ; that one thing—to preach the gospel—remission of sins in the name of Christ, they were positively directed to do. The same Being, who created governments, and requires us to honor and obey them, commanded them, in explicit terms, to do that very thing, even though opposed by kings, governors and councils. Their noble conformity to that command was justified by the very highest authority ; and they went on calmly, fearlessly doing their Lord’s will ; and when the wrath of kings waxed hot against them they were meekly ready for the sacrifice, and un-resistingly bowed their necks to the sword.

But the question is, how we, with no Divine Lord and Master at our side, to instruct and authorize us in every given case, how we shall be sure that we have the sanction of God in a religious opposition to any human law ? Do you say that *feeling*—your own feelings, instruct you as to what God would have you to do ? But feelings

are of contrary qualities. They differ in different men. They depend very much upon habits of association and education. Your feelings may be right or wrong. We would have you to prove to us that they are right. In obedience to the law of God, the feelings of the heart are all and everything. Outward service, with no concurrence of the heart, is impious mockery. But it is otherwise in respect of human enactments. It is no sin to feel that they are imperfect. But the separate question of duty still recurs, must not the law be obeyed, notwithstanding the feelings oppose it? Which shall be ascendant, principle or impulse?

Is your *conscience* a correct exponent of God's will and law? Here we have need of the most careful analysis, the most cautious discriminations. We are all accustomed to admit that the man who follows a good conscience, in a good cause, even unto death, is the noblest of his race. Such a man is above your pity, above your jest. But the glory of the act lies in the emphasis of the qualifying word, a *good* conscience and a *good* cause. Therefore to infer that *every* conscience, in *every* cause is the highest law for human conduct is a most perilous sophism. We read in the Word of God of an *evil* conscience, a *weak* conscience and a *defiled* conscience. What is Conscience? I will not delay or perplex you with the metaphysics of the schools. I will not pronounce whether it is an *act* of the mind or a *faculty* of the mind. I will not say whether it is an original or a derived faculty. If the latter, I will not trace its pedigree, or decide which theory was right, that of Adam

Smith or of Sir James Mackintosh. A more general answer will suffice ; it is the mind itself, pronouncing judicially upon its own acts. It is the testimony of the mind approving actions which it thinks to be good, and reproaching itself with those it believes to be evil. It is the judgment of the mind in view of certain rules. It does not originate the rule. It is not the legislative power that enacts laws, but the judicial power that decides on our conformity to law. It is a faculty which itself needs to be instructed. A sun-dial can be of no use except it be fixed by a true meridian ; and even then the old fashioned inscription is verified, “*Nihil sine lumine*”—Useless without the sun. Clothe every conscience with the authority of law, if it be not rightly instructed, it is the ringleader in mischief. Saul of Tarsus verily thought within himself that he *ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus. As the conscience is the mind itself, and the mind is the man, the man may be ignorant, he may be imbecile, he may be prejudiced, he may be wilfully ignorant, he may be self-interested and self-willed ; he may have a small share of that wisdom that “looketh before and after,” and, consequently, his opinion cannot be authoritative to himself or to another. Sincerity of judgment is no proof of its correctness. “There is a way that *seemeth* right to a man, but the end thereof is death.” He *ought* to know more and judge better than he does.

Because there is a sweetness and a glory in the testimony of a good conscience, acting in religious matters, under the clear light and positive teach-

ings of Revelation, many infer, most fallaciously, that there is a sacredness and divine authority even in their errors of judgment if they but endow them with the name of conscience.

Nemo suae mentis motus non æstimat æquos
Quodve volunt homines, se bene velle putant.

There is no truth in Theology more clearly defined than the necessity of informing, instructing, and regulating the conscience by correct rules. A man who is conscientious in doing wrong is the most dangerous of his race. He has the propelling power without the helm or the brake. So far as the conscience is *accurately* informed, by the light of nature, or by the Revelation of God, it is of use and value ; but the weight to be attached to the judgment of an individual on other matters, even though it passes by the name of conscience, is to be proportioned to our estimate of his intelligence, wisdom and goodness. As Jeremy Taylor has expressed it, in that Thesaurus of philosophy and erudition, the “Ductor Dubitantium,” “a man may be conducted by an abused conscience, so long as the legislative reason is not conjoined to the judge conscience, that is, while by unapt instruments we suffer our persuasions to be determined.” Beyond the fact that a man follows his own conscience there lies another question, ‘Is his conscience **RIGHT** ? Is it correct, true, and good ?’ A good conscience is one that is intelligently acquiescent with the will of God. The question then immediately recurs, how do we know in a given case, not defined in the Revealed Word, what

the will of God is? We have no Urim and Thummim to furnish us with an infallible decision. We have no Holy of Holies from which the voice of God proceeds in audible directions. We have no visible Form of supreme law to whom we may go as the disciples to Christ, saying "Lord, what wilt thou have us to do?" who will resolve for us every point of casuistry by an infallible interpretation. We do not believe in any Pope as the vicegerent of God. The Pantheist is perfectly consistent when he makes the instinct, the feeling of the individual man the supreme law, for his language is that 'man is God,' and according to him the idea of mistake or wrong is an absurdity. But we believe in man's personality and individuality, moreover in his errors and sins.

I will not shrink from the responsibility of answering this question; how may we hope to arrive at the knowledge of God's will, and what are the elements of a good conscience?

We arrive at that high conviction by the calm exercise of our own reason; by intelligent thinking; by honest judgments, and by the use of all human and *inspired* wisdom which we can command. It will not be communicated to us miraculously. We must think; we must study; we must compare; we must judge; we must pray. We must take the Word of God, and inquire how this or that course of conduct will square with this divine and infallible law. Perhaps we shall not all be perfectly agreed in our judgments. There are different degrees of intelligence, comprehension, honesty and candor among men. So long as differ-

ences of capacity and character exist, there will be differences of opinion. Perfect unanimity of sentiment is not to be expected in a world of imperfection. We arrive at ultimate truths by a long process of discussions and experiments; it may be, by mistakes and corrections, but truth is the ultimate result if candor and kindness are at the helm.*

Now, in forming our opinion as to the will of God, in a particular case, where definite instructions are withheld, there is one consideration, which must be our religious guide. It is an inseparable element of a *good* conscience in distinction from a *rash*, *prejudiced*, or *ignorant* conscience. That is an intelligent **LOOKING AT CONSEQUENCES.**†

* No shadow of ambiguity can rest upon the course to be pursued by one who receives religious principles at large, or particular instructions *immediately from Heaven*, and who is commanded to promulgate what he has so learned. Whosoever has a commission of this sort may calmly discharge his duty, and may leave all consequences to Him who has foreseen every contingency. This being obvious, it seems not less so that the absence of miraculous attestations ought to make some difference in the conduct, or at least in the style of those who insist upon conformity to their opinions. If the man who derives his opinions simply (by his own confession) from his personal study of the scriptures, and who has enjoyed none but ordinary aids, and who can advance no pretensions which other men may not also challenge, is entitled to speak in the tone, and to exercise the authority of a prophet or apostle, then where was the necessity of the extraordinary powers with which prophets and apostles were endowed?

We should not for a moment hold controversy with a man

† A right conscience is that which guides our actions by right and proportioned means to a right end.—**DUCTOR DUBITANTIUM.**

I know that it is fashionable in some quarters, to cry out against the philosophy of *expediency*, as if it were synonymous with a mean, *time-serving* policy. Society has not a greater danger to apprehend than that which arises from this one mistake. I cannot 'take it for granted,' all at once, that any law is to be resisted, and resisted forcibly, without looking at the consequences of that resistance. These I must weigh and compare, in forming my judgment as to what the will of God is. Give me an express command from the mouth of the Lord, and I have nothing to do with consequences. Should the edict be as from the King of Babylon, that no man should pray, we would do as Daniel did, for God has commanded us to pray. But in the absence of specific directions, in cases confessedly intricate and involved how may I know

whether he ought or ought not to promulgate the will of God *when he knows it*, and to challenge the obedience of all men to that will. This duty is granted, but we may surely ask him to exhibit his credentials. We shall be the first to submit to his dictation, when we have actually seen the seal of heaven in his hand, and are satisfied on the capital point of his divine legation.

The occult and fundamental principle of all religious rancour, and fanaticism, whether it be avowed or not, is this *assumption of divine authority* in behalf of what is simply an individual opinion. "I THINK so" is the whole residuum that can be found after evaporating the prodigious pretensions of the zealot demagogue. What is this will of God? This authority of Heaven? This sacred cause of Truth and Righteousness? Nothing, absolutely nothing more than "I THINK so." Strip the schismatic declamation of its finery and its sublimity, of its thunder and its fire, and there remains just this meagre and scarcely visible particle, the intrinsic value of which it would be impossible to express.—SATURDAY EVENING. *Art. Charity and Conscience.*

what the will of God is, but, among other things, by a sagacious and benevolent comparison of effects and results. Without this, so far as they come within the range of my judgment, I am a blind man; and I am striking in the dark. The great law of Christian expediency is the law of God's own kingdom; and may be defined as the using of the best means for the best ends. Those ends must come under my consideration as an intelligent Christian. Imperfections, incidental evils may be in the way, but in studying to know my duty as a Christian, I forswear my reason, if I do not calmly and solemnly measure results.

Admitting that the right of revolution resides in every people; that those for whose advantage government was instituted, possess the right to modify the form of that government, or resist its action when needful for their greater good; it must be the first question to be decided, whether the proposed change or resistance does involve that greater good, the prospect of which alone justifies the change. That question has been revolved and decided by every martyr and patriot who ever suffered for freedom and for truth. It is the settlement of that one question which makes the difference between a patriotic revolution, and lawless rebellion. That was the question which was agitated and decided in Great Britain in 1688. The leaders of the people saw the perils of revolution. They took into account, on the one hand, all the evils and all the hopes which attended a change; and on the other hand, all the evils and advantages there were in a continued succession. Weighing these together, they decided that the

evils they endured and must endure under the reign of the bigoted James, more than counter-balanced all the advantages which could accrue from his administration of the state. Looking into futurity, acting for posterity as well as for themselves, they decided that the interests of the Protestant religion, that the general order, stability, and happiness of the country required a change in the government, and the adoption of a new succession. The action had regard beyond incidental evils to an ultimate good. The action was justified by Christian expediency, and so was one, as we believe, which secured the favor and blessing of God.

The same question was revolved and resolved by our fathers in their memorable struggle for independence. They were burdened with evils. They sought their removal. They petitioned, they remonstrated. By all legal and prescribed methods they sought for relief and redress. At length the question stared them full in the face, whether, painful as it was, difficult as it was, it was not better, on the whole, for their posterity, for their country, and for the world, to forego all connection with the mother country and establish a new government for themselves. That question was decided, thoughtfully, calmly, solemnly, prayerfully. We believe it was decided wisely; that it was decided in accordance with the will of God; for it was decided according to Christian expediency; the endurance of incidental evil for an ultimate greater and more glorious good. That same question is to be met, answered, decided intelligently by every man, before he is justified in resistance to government and law. I do not say

that the case cannot arise in which resistance is justifiable. Far am I from affirming that human laws cannot be wrong, and that we must always give to them an indiscriminate approval. But when the question of duty arises as to acquiescence or resistance, and I set myself to quadrate my conscience with the will of God, I must, in the absence of definite directions, in settling and deciding what is right and what is duty, take into account the consequences which follow my decision. The divine right of government is in its tendency to public happiness; and the divine right of resistance is to be inferred from the tendency of that resistance to a greater happiness than could follow acquiescence; and until that tendency is made clear and certain, he that resisteth the power resisteth God.

Both of the Revolutions from which I have drawn my illustrations derive all their splendor from the great principle on which they rest, that *the public good is the great end of government*.

As to the question of the *constitutionality* of any law; that belongs not to the department of Christian ethics. That is a matter of simple legal and judicial decision. When the inquiry is raised, is this or that enactment legal and constitutional, we refer it to the proper tribunal for investigation. The language of the town clerk of Ephesus to the vociferous mob that would have done violence to Paul was truly sensible. "Ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly; the law is open, and there are deputies; let them implead one another." Be thankful to God that you live in a land where questions of law are not decided arbitrarily by the will of an individual; but in open court, with

thronging back, peopling the air, as if incapable of enjoying their repose, while any uncertainty overhangs the fruit of their sufferings and toils. I see the eyes of millions from every part of the world turned towards us, eagerly watching the great experiment of self-government. I see the exiled and the sad from every land hastening for shelter to our shores; finding liberty, home, and hope, beneath the protection of wholesome laws. I see the unparalleled blessings which Divine Providence has conferred upon us in the past, the present, and which open before us in the future. I see a nation of freemen, stretching from state to state, from sea to sea; free thought, free labor, free religion, a free Bible; schools, homes and churches; a nation involving in its success the hopes of the world. Then I turn my tearful eye to that dark spot in our history—that great mystery of Providence; but I seem to see “the stars in their courses fighting” against it. I feel that the evil is subordinate and incidental; not primary and intentional; and comparing evil with good, the smile of gladness will shine through the tears of my regret. I cannot, I dare not, I will not take the torch of Erostratus and apply it to a temple which is the wonder of the world, and a glory unto God. I will wait. I will hope. I will pray. My faith in God bids me be calm, patient, hopeful; believing that trials will consolidate our institutions, wisdom and goodness will perfect them, and that, with God’s blessing, they will stand for us, for our children and children’s children, a beneficent shelter and guardianship for an intelligent, industrious, contented, united, Christian people, to the end of time.